

VOCATION OF A GADFLY



E.A. Bucchianeri

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Vocation of a Gadfly

Book Two of the Gadfly Saga



E.A. Bucchianeri

From the back cover:

Some White Collar jobs are more difficult than others ...

After the night of the horrific accident, everyone's lives have been turned upside down.

With his brother in a coma and his inexperienced little sister asked to take her place at Reinold International Shipping Enterprises, Monsignor Peter Reinold is granted rare permission from the archbishop to do the unorthodox and temporarily return to his former executive life in the world to help the family through this tragic time. For charity's sake he agrees to keep things running until she finds her feet, ever wary of the dangerous surroundings he is about to enter, for an old flame is only waiting for such an opportunity and will do everything to snare him back.

Faced with smouldering temptations, Peter soon finds another battle lies in store when an unusual case is brought before him that requires his rare spiritual expertise. A gravely ill young woman is in dire need of assistance. Doctors are at a loss, nursing staff are terrified. Her legal guardians turn to him as their last hope, it is now up to him. Armed only with his faith, prayer and his exorcism weapons, Peter dares to defy an ancient enemy only to discover an inferno prepared to destroyed him.

Will he and those around him survive the ordeal?

Find out in **Vocation of a Gadfly**, Book Two of the Gadfly Saga



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This book is dedicated
to all souls who suffer spiritual affliction.

May they receive the help they need, in God's name.

Illúmina fáciem tuam super servum tuum,
et salvum me fac in tua misericórdia:
Dómine, non confúndar, quóniam invocávi te.

(Psalm 30, 17-18)

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... He wished he didn't have to go out tonight. As he went up the rectory stairs, he could hear the voices in the common room, his fellow pastors enjoying some community time together before dinner. The door was left ajar, he could hear Fr. Mark relaying his mishap at the hospital that day to the others. He had been sent to the wrong room and frightened a patient into thinking he was being prepared to meet his Maker when he was only staying overnight for medical observation having bumped his noggin on a shelf at home. What made it worse, the patient replied if his time had come, surely it was a rabbi that should have been sent to him? The poor bloke wasn't even Christian! The room detonated with another round of laughter. Ah Mark, how you keep forgetting what I told you! Don't rely on the nurses to keep track of the *spiritual* patients, always verify who's in the bed. Peter chuckled to himself. Mark, oh Mark, so eager to serve, but forever getting into a jam. Feeling better after a quick shower, he came down just as they were heading to the dining room.

"Ah, there you are, lad," Fr. O' Conner greeted. "Not going out again are you?"

"Yes, dinner with the superiors."

"That's right," Fr. Mark remembered. "Don't look so worried, it sounds like you may be promoted again."

"If not, look at it this way, at least you won't be subjected to Fred's cooking tonight," Fr. Jenkins noted with a big grin. One of the visiting seminarians from Africa insisted on helping with the dinners, unintentionally inflicting additional penance on them all long after the Lenten season had passed. They had no idea what national dish he would introduce to them next, the smells wafting from the kitchen were not very promising.

"Shh, you know the lad means well," Fr. O' Conner reminded him, but he too was not looking forward to their evening meal. "Just offer it up. God help us, I hope we have enough antacid to tide us over 'til the morning."

"Someone better put that on the shopping list," Fr. Mark added.

"Hey, don't let us hold you up, you don't want to keep them waiting," Fr. Jenkins replied.

"See you later then."

Back in the car, Peter headed in the direction of the Archbishop's residence, hoping they would not make it an extended occasion. The housekeeper greeted him at the door and took his coat.

"Good evening, Monsignor. They're waiting for you in the front parlour. Dinner will be served shortly."

"Thank you, Clare. So, how does it fare this evening? Is this a night of

breaking bread, or is the Inquisition settling in to give me a good roast?"

"Ha ha! If they don't, I've got a nice lamb roast on, which is certainly better! But seriously, it's rather starchy tonight with another archbishop present, but they're having a laugh or two, so, I'd say, so-so. It's doesn't look like you're in any hot water."

"Thanks. You're a dear." Bless her heart, Clare was always on the look out for him, afraid he might receive the ire of His Eminence with some of the odd and unexpected pastoral care he gave to his parishioners and penitents on occasion.

"Forgive me, but I've got to check on the oven, or you're all getting charcoal for supper. Look lively now! You know how he is." Clare laughed as she returned to her duties, leaving him go. He had been to the Archbishop's residence enough times to be allowed the liberty of finding his way to the designated room whenever he was invited over. Knocking on the door, he found their Eminences partaking of a libation while they waited. They stood up as he entered.

"Good evening, Pete," Archbishop Foley greeted, shaking his hand. "I'm glad you could make it, knowing how busy you are these days. Kenneth, I believe you've already met Monsignor Reinold," he noted, turning to Archbishop Morrison.

"Yes, quite a few times in Rome, and also on this side of the pond," he replied, shaking him by the hand. "It's good to see you again. How is your family, and of course, your brother?"

"They're all holding up as well as can be expected."

"Naturally, it was a terrible thing to have happened, and to the Walsinghams too for that matter, the wedding having to be put off and all."

"It's a tragedy," Peter agreed, "but hopefully next year might be better, God willing."

"Let's hope so." Archbishop Foley nodded. "Would you like a drink? Scotch perhaps?"

Peter rarely drank these days, but accepted the scotch and sat down with them, engaging in casual conversation before it was time to go to the dining room. Morrison fondly recalled his time in Rome, Peter too could enjoy the reminiscing, having studied and received his ordination there. He had always loved visiting the grand ancient metropolis on his business trips, but as a seminarian, had enjoyed the luxury of completely concentrating on the spiritual life, visiting the famous shrines, churches and the catacombs between lectures. He had met Morrison one day at the chapel of the British College where he had received special permission to offer his first Mass on the famous altar dating from Elizabethan times, a butcher's block, a gruesome *momento mori* reminding the newly ordained English

missionaries what was facing them when they returned to their blood drenched isle. He was teased by his new friends at the North American College, about how their chapel was not good enough for him, but he needed that reminder just as the English seminarians of old. The chopping block was not confined to one era, nor one form or country. There were many types of martyrdoms, spiritual as well as physical ones; visible and invisible, the block took on many forms and could be encountered anywhere, any time.

“So, James tells me you are saying the Tridentine Rite these days.”

Peter’s mind snapped back to the present.

“Yes, I’m grateful for his permission. His Holiness wanted more priests to say the Latin Mass.”

“Of course, of course.” Archbishop Morrison nodded edgily. Peter could tell his Eminence still preferred the vernacular rite and all the supposed reforms that were to bring the Church into the modern age. Observing the old ways was often a cause of disagreement among the clergy. There were many who viewed those who clung to tradition as obstinate recusants refusing to part with an ‘obsolete’ past even though the old ways continued to be lawfully permitted by the Vatican. He decided to tread carefully.

“It keeps one part of the congregation quiet. Good thing Pete’s willing to do it,” Archbishop Foley replied with a civil laugh, attempting to keep the conversation on an even keel. Clare knocked on the door. “I believe dinner is served. Shall we,” he noted, rising from his chair.

As usual, Clare outdid herself whenever his Eminence had company, but this time went to considerable trouble having set out the best linens, china, silverware and Waterford crystal. Raised to be the perfect cultured gentleman accustomed to these opulent settings Peter nevertheless reflected on life at the old rectory with its motley assortment of dented and outdated furniture donated by parishioners over the years, the mismatched place settings and chipped tableware that would occur over an epoch of breakage and odd replacements, not to mention the faded carpets and conflicting wallpaper that had seen better days, jumbled décor that would be found in a house with a bunch of bachelors living on parish stipends who had hardly time to worry about the aesthetic coordination of their surroundings. There was peace and contentment with his brother priests, no longer did he have to live with the rigid formality associated with his past life. While he did appreciate the occasional perks that came his way, he could let them go with serene detachment. All he really needed now was a roof, a bed, and something edible once in awhile. Sometimes that last part was sketchy depending who was doing the cooking, but he was still quite content.

Dinner passed pleasantly, discussions of the latest developments and

projects in their respective parishes, including the recent funerals that Peter had officiated, before musing on the latest news from Rome such as the Pope's upcoming papal visit to Denver for World Youth Day and other world events which took up most of the conversation. The dessert dishes cleared, Archbishop Foley invited his guests back to the parlour for a brandy. Talk had circled around to parish work again, and the thread was resumed as they sat back in their armchairs.

"I suppose we should get to the subject of why we're gathered here tonight," his Eminence began.

"Yes, I think so," Archbishop Morrison agreed. "I have come to ask James a special favour, which involves you, if you're willing that is."

"I see," Peter replied calmly. He was right, he had guessed something was heading in his direction. Oh Lord, not another promotion, and please, I'd much prefer parish work. *But not as I will ...*

"Don't worry Pete, this isn't what you think," the Archbishop noted with amusement. "I don't think he's forgiven me since I gave him that title," he clarified to his peer.

"Ah, no honours, is that it, son?" Morrison turned to Peter. "Don't let it bother you. From what I hear, you deserve it."

As he feared: the rumours of his discernment were spreading far, singling him out.

"I wouldn't say that."

"No false modesty now, I hear the cathedral is receiving record attendance for confessions, and I need not mention single-handedly bringing the Walsinghams' daughter into the Church. That could not have been easy, considering how her family are strict Episcopalians. My hand to you."

"I really didn't have too much to do with that," Peter replied a little discomfited, he would never force anyone. While the Church was often referred to as a ship in mystical allegory, it was not supposed to be an unscrupulous navy shanghaiing passengers and crew. It was a Kingdom with open citizenship for anyone wishing to enter. Katherine had come of her own free will, it just happened that he was the only spiritual director she knew, one to whom she could frankly ask questions about their beliefs at length without fear of offending. How he disliked the Church discussed as though it were a business with a recruitment centre, with him portrayed as top headhunter.

"I beg to differ, but of course, you will be her brother-in-law shortly, so naturally she would turn to you," Foley noted. "It certainly *would* be an accomplishment though if any of her family followed her example, fine pillars of

the community I hear.”

“Yes, quite so,” Morrison agreed, “you do know they frequently donate to the Catholic Relief fund.”

“So you told me.” He nodded. “But forgive us Pete, again we’ve wandered from the matter at hand. To get to the point, Kenneth has asked to enlist your services as an exorcist.”

“Oh?”

“Actually, nothing too involved. I just require your opinion on a case,” Archbishop Morrison clarified.

“Of course. Only, I thought that Father Xavier was your diocesan exorcist,” Peter reflected., “I can’t help but be surprised you would need my opinion.”

“Well, this is not my idea,” Morrison admitted, looking a little irked. “Father Xavier has reviewed this case and is convinced it’s a matter of mental disturbance, but the family of the patient refuses to stop pestering my office. They fully believe their relative is suffering from a diabolical attack. They’re demanding a second opinion.”

“I see. Very well. Then I assume Father Xavier did not perform the Major Rite.”

“Correct, and I will not allow it to be performed until I can be certain that there is an absolute need for it. You know how these things are looked down upon, the Church is already seen as a backward relic to begin with, while a number of its ceremonies, especially exorcism, is considered a vestige of a superstitious past. We must avoid putting out that negative image as much as possible.”

Peter pursed his lips and studied the contents of his glass. It was the classic impediment to discerning a true diabolical possession as opposed to mental illness. The devil and his minions were shrewd, crafty enemies. They could mimic diseases of all kinds, hide behind them undetected and torment the afflicted for years. It took someone with a keen eye and a highly developed sense of their own soul as well as the spiritual world to discern the real from bogus mental illnesses and call a halt to this malicious siege, usually because the demons would not blow their cover unless provoked with something very powerful. The Major Rite was one sure proof as the spirits would be forced to answer and give their names, but until it was ascertained there was a case of demonic activity to begin with, exorcists were not given permission to perform it, bound by the virtue of obedience to their ecclesial superiors. The demons knew this very well and took full advantage of the Church’s reluctance to use that ‘backward’ rite. Hell was working furiously to maintain this intolerant and condescending perception of exorcism, sometimes it

sounded to Peter's interior ears of the soul as if the Enemy was laughing sadistically at his frustration with this deadlock.

"All right, well, it might help if I knew what he did do, and of course, any details on the person who is suffering from these disturbances."

"Allow me," said Foley. "I left the case file in the study. No don't get up, no ceremony, I'll be back in a minute." He placed his glass down and exited the room. Morrison took the opportunity to engage in polite conversation.

"I appreciate this, Peter. You know, it still amazes me that you chose this particular apostolate in the Church. You could have had your pick of the enviable positions, and yet James tells me you insist on exorcist work."

"No one else seemed willing to do it."

"I wonder why," the Archbishop wryly commented. "Tell me, Pete, may I call you Pete? Any interesting episodes in your chosen career since you were appointed?"

Despite the prevailing scepticism concerning exorcism, human curiosity always prevailed. Peter did have some strange experiences with house clearings, but he was not about to open a can of worms and stuck to the issue at hand.

"If you mean a serious demonic possession case with a person, no not really. Mostly people who were suffering from depression, and two major schizophrenic cases, things of that nature, people needing deliverance prayers, nothing that would require the Major Rite."

"I see, so, you would be able to confirm Fr. Xavier's assessment."

"Yes, and also if the opposite is true, if it is as the family of the victim suspects."

"Oh come now, it's all a matter of mental disturbance, pure and simple. We know exorcism is only a help for those afflicted to help them come to terms with their illness, make them believe something dark within them has been driven away so they can move on with the healing process."

"I respectfully beg to differ," Peter said guardedly. "It just happens that diagnosing a veritable possession is a rare occurrence."

"Well, as you're the man who's doing the fieldwork, I won't argue. James tells me you have spent some time with Father Amaranth. I suppose he's showed you his famous jar collection." His Eminence snickered slightly.

Yes, that famous jar collection. How eagerly Fr. Amaranth would show to anyone willing to listen to his disturbing assortment of objects disgorged by the possessed during his exorcisms over the years: innumerable nails of all shapes and

sizes, shards of broken glass, handfuls of marbles and other sundry items in the hope people would wake up to the necessity of his ministry. Instead, it opened the old priest to more ridicule by the incredulous, but he refused to give up. Yes, Peter had seen those jars, but mercifully he was spared having to answer as his superior made his way back.

“Did I miss anything,” Archbishop Foley enquired, manilla file in hand.

“I was just remarking that Peter had studied with the head exorcist of Rome,” Archbishop Morrison recapitulated.

“That he did. Peter here is very interested in doing this. I told him if he really wanted something to challenge him that badly, he could help out with the prison ministry, but no, he says this is what he’s meant to do. Here you are, it’s not a pretty picture,” Foley concluded, handing him the dossier before sitting down and sipping his brandy.

Peter set down his glass and opened the file. His eyes were first confronted with the dead, expressionless features of a brown haired girl in her mid twenties, her photograph clipped to the right hand corner of the general psychiatric evaluation that had been given to her family. Her lips pursed, face gaunt and blanched, dark brown eyes glowering and devoid of light; this girl, Melissa Yardley, had been through horrific traumas. He did not have time to read everything right then and quickly glanced through the first page written by her relatives relating her personal details; she ran away from home to escape an abusive stepfather and went to live with them, a maternal uncle and his wife. However, she grew rebellious, eventually ran away from home again. Her aunt and uncle reported her missing and did not know what had happened to her for several years until she had been brought in to a hospital. She had made her way to New York, fallen in with the wrong crowd, they could only assume the worst, drugs and a promiscuous lifestyle, but no one could know for sure, she was suffering from what the clinical reports described as severe psychotic delusions and hallucinations, proving to be a danger to herself and others. Multiple scars on her arms indicated she was self-harming, not to mention other signs telling of her suicidal tendencies.

These were only the physical signs, the outward appearances. Many people suffered from psychological traumas and were not possessed. However, his soul, recoiling from the mere touch of the dossier, told him more than mere printed words and a glossy photograph could. It was similar to the feeling he experienced when handling a cursed object. His spirit could feel an evil emanating from the file as though it harboured a malevolent entity. Thankfully, up to now it was a rare occasion when he felt something like this. He was instantly reminded of one extreme case concerning a house clearing when he had been drawn to an old antique table, not in appreciative attraction for the beautiful woodwork, but as though he were a soldier scouting out a field of battle and from the corner of his

eye could see through the enemy's camouflage. He eyed the piece warily, then calmly made the sign of the cross with holy water. The table abruptly cracked as if exposed to intense heat and a muffled thumping resounded over his head as if something invisible was trying to fly and escape, frightening the owner of the house. Peter instantly knew what was wrong, the table had been used for séances, ouija sessions, tarot card readings and quite possibly, black spells. No longer used for these purposes, it was still a portal bringing evil to the next generation that owned it. His advice: burn the thing, then, a total clearing would be needed to ensure any vestiges of its presence in the house were dispelled. He would say the Minor Rite of deliverance, bless the house, then say Mass in the room where the table had been. The owner protested at first, but eventually did as he suggested and allowed him to carry out the necessary rites, and the dark feelings that were felt on the premises left immediately once that was done. Peter could feel this girl was suffering from a similar attack, but much blacker, a demonic Hell-chain held her in a vice grip and would torment her for the rest of her life unless she could be released, it would drag her to the abyss if possible. God help her, how did she get tangled up in such a mess? He would not be able to tell for certain until her free will had been restored to a point and she was at liberty to confide in him, or the demon be forced to answer.

How could Fr. Xavier not see what was lurking within? Of course, Peter had to remind himself that not everyone could feel situations or pierce through them with their interior eye as he could. Still, even if the majority of priests were not granted discernment this markedly, a certain level of this spiritual skill could be acquired by detachment from the world, a constant and diligent prayer life plus careful observation. The difficulty nowadays people were too busy to be aware of the importance of nourishing a spiritual life and the true existence of Hell and Heaven. Prayer life and going to Mass on Sunday, activities with designated time slots and forgotten once completed. It was very easy for them to miss the tangible presence of Hell despite the turmoil in the world confirming its existence. Hmm, just what *did* Fr. Xavier do?

Peter looked through the papers for Fr. Xavier's assessment and found very little to go on. His ecclesial colleague saw nothing that warranted an exorcism. All he witnessed were supposed hallucinations and at other times delusions of persecution. What looked like personality changes and the victim fighting off unseen presences were only figments of a disordered mind he concluded. While he visited her, the girl did nothing of the preternatural, such as speak in an unfamiliar or ancient language, nor disclose knowledge unknown to her. Obviously, the more pronounced supernatural occurrences didn't happen at the time Peter surmised, such as levitation of the victim or objects around her. No, the demon is too smart in this case, he's not about to show his hand that quickly. He had the distinct impression this was not one of the lesser minions at work, something

knowledgeable and high up in the demonic hierarchy was calling the shots here. Peter could not help but feel disappointed with Fr. Xavier, he should have known better, but then, so many priests were not properly trained for this particular ministry in the Church, even in Rome the training for exorcism was sketchy at best. If it wasn't for 'the gift' and his own careful study of the matter over the years, Peter felt he too might have been stuck out on left field. He hoped it was just a case of inexperience on Fr. Xavier's part. At least Peter could tell instantly when something was wrong, but sometimes 'the gift' was a horrific burden, he often felt weighed down by the knowledge he received.

To make matters more complicated, Peter could not tell their Eminences right there and then what he sensed, that they had a true case of possession on their hands. His spiritual premonitions were not enough to begin the Major Rite. Documented evidence with witnesses would be needed to convince them, plus a consent form signed by the possessed once permission was granted, and in any case, he dare not mention this ability to read spiritual situations. There were those in the Church who dreaded any sign of the mystical supernatural working through one of their own. If there was not outright jealousy, there was complete disbelief to the point of ridicule and persecution. Right now, he had to keep this quiet, address the situation in a round about way if he hoped to help this girl.

"So, what do you think," Archbishop Foley enquired after a minute.

"Judging from these reports, I can see why Fr. Xavier considered this was nothing more than a mental breakdown, but I would need to see her in person to make a full assessment, and it might take a few meetings, just to be absolutely certain," Peter noted.

"Of course, James says you're always thorough, which is good for me, but I wouldn't mind getting this sorted as soon as possible," Archbishop Morrison replied.

"All right, but you don't mind if I probe a little deeper into this case? That is, that I have your full permission to do what is necessary to get some answers?"

"Er, of course, you have my full permission to probe on my pastoral turf, if that's what you need to hear," Morrison noted with some amusement. He had heard Monsignor Reinold was a stickler for certain details all right, but did he need his permission for that too? Peter ignored the bantering tone, he had what he needed. He didn't mind if getting the job done right made him an annoying pain in the neck. At least he had developed a tough hide in the corporate world, it did have some advantages after all.

"Very well then. Sundays I'm basically free, after my morning parish duties of course. I could see her beginning this weekend."

"Whenever you're free to do this, I'd be grateful."

“That’s settled then, we can arrange everything with the girl’s family tomorrow. More brandy,” Archbishop Foley offered, glad the necessary unpleasanties of the night were over. Peter declined the top up as he had to drive home.

Presently, the evening came to a close and the Archbishop apologized for keeping them up late considering they had an early morning ahead of them. Peter took the case file with him to study in his own time and slid it into his black curate case that he left in the trunk of the car before he drove back to the rectory. He had to make sure that no one else would read the file, not just because Miss Yardley’s general psychiatric evaluation was included, simply an act of charity. Unless permitted to be released by the victims and their families, the names of those requiring exorcisms were to be kept confidential by the Church to ensure that once they were set free from their tormentors they did not receive torturers in human form. What would be the point in helping someone only to have everyone single them out as a freak? The victim would be a source of gossip and sin to others, nor would they ever be able to get on with their life and have any peace. That is, if a priest was allowed to help them in the first place. Prejudice against the rite of exorcism was a terrible obstacle, not to mention the distressing lack of faith with numbers of the clergy who entertained the ludicrous notion that demons and possessions were delusions of the medieval period. It pained Peter to see that even the highest authorities in the Church remained blindly indifferent to the Gospels, that Christ cast out demons as well as healed the sick, they were separate miraculous actions and pointedly recorded as such by the Evangelists. There was an alarming unspoken mandate operating within the Church in these desperate times: you may preach about love, forgiveness, prayer to heal the sick, helping the poor, the usual happy feel-good subjects, let us be motivators, but do not mention Hell, damnation or devils please, thank you very much. That will not keep the offertory baskets filled. What a dangerous principle Peter often mused, to teach the Good News without explaining the Bad News that must be conquered. It is no different than if generals lauded the honours and medals that could be won in victorious combat without preparing their cadets how to fight or refused to teach them their enemies’ tactics because war is disagreeable. That was not good enough for him, a responsible general or captain had to know his enemy and prepare the troops. Peter had no qualms about giving rousing fire and brimstone sermons when necessary considering he would one day answer to God for the souls placed in his care.

It was good to call it a night, never before did the stairs up to the bedrooms look so inviting. By now, the rectory was quiet except for the muffled sounds of the television coming from the community room, someone was still up. Peter opened the door an inch to see Fr. O’Conner fast asleep in an armchair. Obviously, he had waited up for him. He turned off the old set and gently shook

the slumbering man's arm.

"Don't mind me, I was just restin' my eyes." He stretched the stiffness away. "So, how did it go? When do you get your crosier?"

"Not ever, I hope." Peter smiled. "I don't think I'd make a good bishop, not according to today's standards, or lack thereof."

"Nonsense, lad. You're a natural leader, we could use men with some backbone. Tell me, how did the evening go? They're not transferring you, are they?"

"No, I've been given a mercy mission in fact."

"Oh? On top of all the extra work you have? Care to share, or is it confidential?"

"All I can say is I've been asked to assess a mental patient in Archbishop Morrison's area and see if there is cause to begin an exorcism."

"You don't say? Sounds mighty serious, judging from your expression. You feel you have a real one on your hands this time," he noted quietly, meeting Peter's eyes directly. He didn't have to say anything, Fr. O'Conner understood much, one of the few who did without necessarily having the gift of infused discernment himself. "I know you wanted this ministry, but sorry lad, I can't say I congratulate you," he then added, "if it were me, I'd dread what I might find. Come, let's off to bed, you'll need all the forty winks you can get."



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